



**To/
Councillor Robert Francis-Davies
Cabinet Member for Investment,
Regeneration & Tourism
BY EMAIL**

cc: Cabinet Members

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Scrutiny

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SPC/2021-22/3

30 September 2021

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 17 August 2021. It is about Tourism, Destination Management & Marketing and Business & City Promotion.

Dear Councillor Francis-Davies,

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 17 August

We are writing to you following our Scrutiny session, which focussed on specific aspects of your wide-ranging cabinet portfolio, namely Tourism, Destination Management & Marketing and Business & City Promotion.

We wanted to gain a greater understanding of what these specific responsibilities entail, your priorities, resources, performance measures, key headlines / achievements and progress against objectives, and overall assessment (including how we compare with others, challenges / risks) and impact / difference made.

We thank you and officers for attending the meeting and providing a written report on these responsibilities and the Council's work. The Committee asked questions in order to explore this work and provide challenge on actions and performance in relation to these areas of responsibility, as well as future thinking.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU
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This letter reflects on what we learnt from the information presented, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee, and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response - main issues summarised below.

The following is extracted from the original Letter:

Business & City Promotion

Your paper focused on work carried out within the Council's Planning & City Regeneration Service delivered through the Economic Development and External Funding team who undertake business engagement and inward investment, and the Development and Physical Regeneration team, dealing with business investment and city promotion within the scope of large development schemes.

One of our main points of concern was the availability of advice and support for business, whether about starting-up, council services, funding, learning and improvement, and how easy it was to access. We heard that there had been a reliance on signposting local businesses / individuals to the Welsh Government's Business Wales information, but a new dedicated resource within the Council had recently been established which would see the launch of new Business Swansea business advice web pages and contact details on the Council website. This was coupled with an increase in social media activity to promote the service. We welcomed this news, and this was particularly useful for councillors to be able to signpost to.

We asked about progress with the Parc Felindre site in attracting new businesses. We heard that the last 18 months had been difficult but the economy was now improving and there has been renewed interest in the site with three live discussions with businesses currently ongoing. It was encouraging to hear about this interest, as the site is sizeable, offering good links to the motorway and should be an attractive proposition for companies big and small.

Focusing on the City Centre, we are well aware of the difficulties faced because of not only the pandemic, but also the impact of growth in on-line retail as well as competition from out of town retail parks. The loss of Debenhams, and other big names from our city centre is a concern and we asked about what we are doing as a Council in response. We know that this has affected other cities across the UK and heard that Swansea has not suffered as much as others have, but of course it remained a concern and focus for recovery.

You told us that Cabinet would be considering a City Centre Repurposing Strategy' report, which will identify key interventions and actions to make Swansea fit for the future. The ongoing major investment across the city, such as the Arena development, has improved Swansea's position and ability to

retain and attract business and retail compared with other cities. We noted significant press and public relations work being done to promote the city and its story, and attract investment. We heard that work was ongoing with the owners of the Quadrant about the occupation of empty units and new lettings were due to come on board. We were also told that all of the commercial units outside of the Arena were under offer with good quality local businesses and with the Arena expected to generate 200 plus events per year from around year 3 onwards, this would mean significant footfall, and improve the night-time economy. We noted first year target of around 100 events.

A Swansea less reliant on national chain stores will make Swansea unique and add to its appeal. We acknowledged the importance of a mixed-use city centre in sustaining the city centre, as a place to live, work, shop and enjoy. You felt there was reason to be cautiously optimistic and confident that Swansea was better placed than other comparable cities to thrive post-pandemic. We were pleased to hear the positivity, although felt a solution to the significant unit vacated by Debenhams was urgently needed. The impact of student accommodation on the city centre was also discussed. We agreed that Swansea needed to be a distinctive multi-purpose city, not dependent on the big chain stores or only retail, and plans to improve the green infrastructure and city centre environment were important to that.

We also referred to the good news about the protected status given to Gower Salt Marsh Lamb, helping to put the area on the map, and asked about our work in the promotion of other distinctive local food and produce. We noted that the Economic Recovery Fund would support more work on this with relevant businesses.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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